

HANDY FACTS ON **ICELAND**



WITH 36 COLOUR PHOTOS



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HANDY FACTS ON ICELAND

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The Country

Geography

Iceland, the second largest island in Europe, lies close to the Arctic Circle, between latitude $63^{\circ} 24'$ and $66^{\circ} 33'N$. and between longitude $13^{\circ} 30'$ and $24^{\circ} 32'W$. It is about midway between New York and Moscow as the crow flies. It has a total area of 39,756 square miles (103,000 sq. km.). From north to south the greatest distance is about 190 miles (300 km.), from west to east about 300 miles (500 km.). The coastline, including fiords and inlets, is about 3,700 miles (6,000 km.) long. There are numerous islands around the coasts, some of them inhabited, largest of which are the Vestmann Islands to the south (pop. over 5000), Hrísey to the north (pop. about 300), and Grímsey on the Arctic Circle (pop. about 70). The shortest distance from Iceland to Greenland is 180 miles (287 km.), to Scotland 499 miles (798 km.), and to Norway 606 miles (970 km.).

Geologically Iceland is still a young country, and the process of its formation is still going on. Iceland is in large part a table-land

broken up by tectonic forces. Its interior consists entirely of mountains and high plateaus, devoid of human habitation. Its average height is 500 m. above sea-level, the highest point being *Hvannadals-hnúkur* in the Örfajökull glacier in Southeast Iceland, reaching a height of 6,950 feet (2119 m.). The biggest lowland region is the coastal plain of South Iceland. The country is, with the exception of its southern coast, richly indented with bays and fiords, from most of which great and small valleys run deep into the highlands. A striking feature in the landscape are the numerous gaping fissures running in a N-S direction in the north and in the NE-SW direction in the south. On the whole the country is rugged, abrupt and jagged, and the variety of its scenery immense.

Volcanoes

Iceland is one of the most active volcanic countries in the world. There are about 200 post-glacial volcanoes, at least 30 of which have erupted since the country was settled in the 9th century A.D., while the number of recorded eruptions is



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about 150. On the average an eruption takes place every fifth year. Nearly every type of volcanic activity found in the world is represented in Iceland, the most common being fissure eruptions. One of these, the nearly 20 miles long crater-row *Lakagigar*, with about 100 separate craters, poured out in 1783 the biggest lava flow known to have been produced by any volcano in the world since the beginning of history, covering 218 square miles. The gases and ashes from this eruption poisoned the grasslands, causing great havoc to farming and resulting in one of the greatest

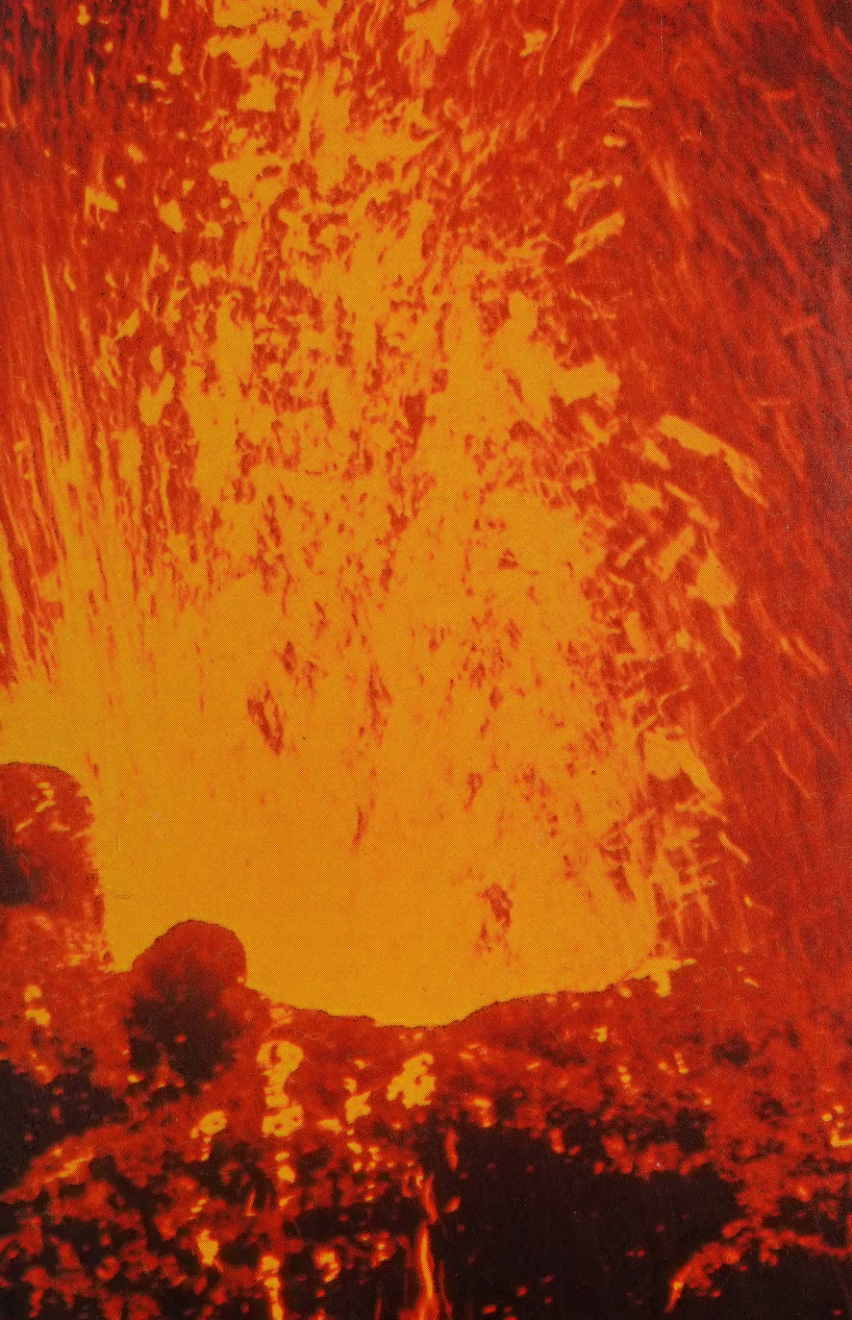
famines in Iceland, followed by thousands of deaths.

Shield volcanoes of the Hawaiian type, like *Skjaldbreidur* near Thingvellir, are also numerous, but the only one active in historical times is the new *Surtsey* volcano. Almost all the cone volcanoes of the Fuji type are icecovered, the largest of them being *Öraefajökull* (6,950 ft.), *Eyjafjallajökull* (5,464 ft.), and *Snaefellsjökull* (4,730 ft.). Explosion craters are also quite common.

The most famous Icelandic volcano is *Hekla*, which was renowned throughout the Catholic world in the Middle Ages as the abode of



In volcanic areas the landscape is often bizarre (above), and volcanic eruptions are frequent (opposite page), Hekla 1970.



the damned. Since its first recorded eruption in 1104, which destroyed vast areas, including the *Thjórsárdalur* settlement, Hekla proper has erupted 15 times, causing great damage in the surrounding countryside. At the beginning of its eruption in March 1947, the eruption column rose to 100,000 feet and the lava covered 25 square miles. The eruption lasted 13 months. In May 1970 a large number of small craters in Hekla erupted, the lava flow lasting for some two months.

The volcano *Katla*, hidden beneath the ice of the *Mýrdalsjökull*, has erupted at least 13 times since the settlement of Iceland, last in 1918. The eruptions of subglacial volcanoes cause enormous floods which for instance in the case of *Katla* may exceed the Amazon river in volume of water. *Askja* in the north-eastern highlands last erupted in 1961, but its eruption in 1875 was the last to cause great damage in the country.

Post-glacial lava covers about 10 per cent of the total area of the country. The largest unbroken lava-field is *Ódádahraun*, about 1,800 square miles.

Submarine eruptions are frequent off the coasts of Iceland, especially on the ridge southwest of *Reykjanes*. The last submarine eruption, near the Vestmann Islands, started

visibly on 14 November 1963, building up three islands; one of them endured and was named *Surtsey*, with an area of nearly 1.5 square miles. The eruption continued for more than two years, attracting scientists and tourists from all over the world.

Earthquakes are frequent in Iceland, but rarely harmful. The most disastrous ones occurred in the southern lowlands in 1784 and 1896, leaving many farms in ruin. The village of *Dalvík* in *Eyjafljörður* in the north was partly destroyed by an earthquake in 1934.

Geysers

Iceland is richer in hot springs and solfataras (high-temperature activity) than any other country in the world. High-temperature activity is limited to the new volcanic median zone where there are 14 solfataras fields. They are characterized by steam holes, mud pools, and precipitation of sulphur. The main high-temperature areas are *Torfajökull* east of Hekla and *Grimsvötn* in the *Vatnajökull* glacier. Next in order of size are *Hengill* near Reykjavík, *Kerlingarfjöll*, *Námafjall*, *Kverkfjöll*, and *Krýsuvík* south of Reykjavík. The total power-output of the *Torfajökull* area, which is the largest, is estimated to



be equivalent to 1,500 megawatts. Some of the high-temperature areas have workable sulphur deposits.

Low-temperature areas with hot springs are found all over Iceland, but they are rare in the eastern basalt area. There are about 250 thermal areas of this type with a total of about 800 hot springs. The average temperature of the water is 75° Centigrade (167°F.). The biggest hot spring in Iceland, *Deildartunguhver*, has a flow of 150 litres (40 gallons) of boiling water per second. Some of the hot springs are spouting springs or geysers, the most famous of which is the *Great Geysir* in Haukadalur in South Iceland, from which the international word geyser is derived. It would eject a water column to a height of about 180 feet (but has been "lazy" in later years). Another renowned geyser in the vicinity of the Great Geysir is the *Strokkur*.

Springs charged with carbon dioxide are to be found in some districts, mainly in Snaefellsnes, but have not yet been utilized. Since the last Hekla eruption springs rising from under the new lava have been found also to be charged with carbon dioxide.

The exploitation of natural-heat resources in Iceland started in 1925, and at present houses in many parts of the country are heated with

natural hot water, including the whole of Reykjavík (pop. over 80,000) and five smaller towns and villages. New projects are being planned. Greenhouses and swimming pools all over the country use natural hot water, and in some places villages have sprung up around the greenhouse cultivation, for instance *Hveragerdi* 25 miles east of Reykjavík, where hot springs are everywhere and greenhouses line many streets.

Glaciers

One of the most distinctive features of Iceland are its glaciers. They cover 4,536 square miles (11,800 sq. km.) or 11.5 per cent of the total area of the country. But during the past few decades they have markedly thinned and retreated owing to a milder climate, and some of the smaller ones have all but vanished.

The altitude of glaciation is lowest in the northwest (about 2,500 ft. or 750 m.) and highest in the interior north of Vatnajökull (about 5,000 ft. or 1,500 m.). Almost all types of glaciers are found in Iceland ranging from the small cirque glaciers to extensive glacier caps reminding one of the inland ice of Greenland. These latter are drained by broad lobe-shaped outlets or by valley glaciers of the alpine type.



By far the largest of the glacier caps is *Vatnajökull* in Southeast Iceland with an area of 3,240 square miles (8,400 sq. km.), equal in size to all the glaciers on the European mainland put together. It reaches a thickness of 3,000 ft. (1,000 m.). One of its southern outlets, *Breidamerkurjökull*, descends to sea level.

Other large glacier caps are *Langjökull* (394 sq. mi. or 1,025 sq. km.), and *Hofsjökull* (381 sq. mi. or 990 sq. km.), both in the central highlands, *Mýrdalsjökull* (264 sq. mi. or 700 sq. km.) in the south, and *Drangajökull* (75 sq. mi. or 200 sq. km.) in the northwest.

On the tip of Snaefellsnes, across the bay from Reykjavík, one of the smaller glaciers, *Snaefellsjökull*, may be seen in clear weather and affords a fascinating sight at sundown. The Icelandic glaciers are exciting goals for hardy adventurers, but many of them are dangerous to cross owing to rifts and crevices in the ice.

Rivers and Lakes

Rivers are numerous in Iceland and relatively voluminous due to the heavy rainfall and abundant glacial meltwater, but none of them is navigable owing to swift currents. Most of the rivers stem from the glaciers and are consequently heavily laden with debris, turbid and

often yellowish brown in colour. The longest, *Thjórsá* in the south, is 143 miles (230 km.) long and has an average discharge of 385 cubic metres per second. The second largest, *Jökulsá á Fjöllum* in the northeast, is 128 miles (206 km.) long. Other big rivers are *Hvítá-Ölfusá* in the south, *Skjálfandafljót* in the north, *Lagarfljót* and *Jökulsá á Brú* in the east.

Icelandic rivers are chiefly of two types, glacier rivers and clear-water rivers. The former usually divide into numerous more or less interlinked tributaries that change their courses all the time and swing over the outwash plains lying below the glaciers. This is especially true of the rivers running south from *Vatnajökull*, in which area it has so far been impossible to build a permanent road, since the bridges and parts of the roads are constantly washed away. The maximum discharge of the glacier rivers is usually in July and August.

Clear-water rivers are of two kinds. One drains the old basalt areas and has a variable discharge with maximum flow in late spring. The other kind drains regions covered with post-glacial lava and usually has small variations in discharge, so that these rivers are best suited for hydro-electric power production.



Characteristic of the youthful Icelandic landscape are the many impressive waterfalls, the most famous being *Gullfoss* (105 ft.), *Dettifoss* (144 ft.) and *Skógafoss* (200 ft.).

It is estimated that the total usable hydro-electric power in Iceland amounts to 3–4 million kW, of which only about 8 per cent has been harnessed.

Lakes in Iceland are abundant, but most of them are rather small. Some of these lakes are formed by subsidence (Thingvallavatn, Kleifarvatn), others fill glacier eroded basins (Lögurinn, Skorradalsvatn), still others are lava dammed (Thórisvatn, Mývatn), while a few are ice dammed (Grænalón). The five biggest lakes in Iceland are *Thingvallavatn* (32 sq. mi. or 83 sq. km.), which is 109 m. deep, *Thórisvatn* (27 sq. mi. or 68 sq. km.), *Lögurinn* (21 sq. mi. or 52 sq. km.), the lagoon lake *Hóp* (18 sq. mi. or 45 sq. km.), and *Mývatn* (15 sq. mi. or 38 sq. km.). Lake Mývatn is world renowned for its fascinating scenery and fabulously rich bird life.

Vegetation

Only about one quarter of the total area of Iceland has a continuous plant cover. This is due mainly to the unfavourable climate, volcanic activity, glacier movements

and overgrazing. The vegetation has greatly deteriorated during the eleven centuries of human habitation, accompanied by extensive soil erosion. The once widespread birch-woods were destroyed by ruthless cutting and grazing, so that only stray remnants of them still survive. Since World War I steps have been taken to halt the erosion. Extensive areas have been protected from grazing, and reafforestation experiments with conifers have been made on a considerable scale. The largest trees are now found in the birch-woods *Hallormsstadarskógur* in the east and *Vaglaskógur* in the north. The rowan and aspen grow in some parts.

In general the vegetation in Iceland is subarctic in character and distinguished by an abundance of grasses, sedges, and related species. Grasslands, bogs and marshes are extensive, and there is much moorland and heathland. But all over the country, also in the inhabited lowlands, there are large areas of bare rock, stony deserts, sandy wastelands, and lava fields.

There are about 500 species of seed-producing and non-seed-producing plants. The most common vegetation consists of various low-growing shrubs, especially heather, crowberry, bog whortleberry, bearberry, willow, and dwarf birch.

*Contrasts are stark in the Land of Fire and Ice
– autumn scene from Thórsmörk,
Eyjafjalla-glacier in background.*





*There is much bird life in the Lake in Reykjavik (upper).
Sheep-farming is widespread throughout Iceland (lower).*

The lava fields are first colonized by lichens and mosses, which are a striking feature in the landscape, specially in the southwest. At higher levels the mosses are less prevalent on the lavafields, while the lichens increase in quantity. These pioneer moss-lichen communities are in time succeeded by communities of higher plants.

Animal Life

When Iceland was settled in the ninth century, the arctic fox was the only land mammal in the country. Foxes are still common all over Iceland and have frequently ravaged the sheep. The brown rat, the black rat, the house mouse, and the field mouse were later accidentally introduced by man. Reindeer were imported from Norway in the late eighteenth century, and there is a considerable number of them in the highlands of the east. About 1930 mink was introduced for fur farming, but soon escaped in great numbers and reverted to the wild state, causing great damage to bird life and fresh-water fish. Polar bears have occasionally visited Iceland on drift ice, but have always been killed shortly after their arrival. There are 17 species of whales and 2 species of indigenous seals (the

common seal and the grey seal); four other species of seal visit Iceland in winter. Whales are caught in considerable numbers during summer, and seals are also caught for their furs at certain restricted periods in some parts of the country. The most common domestic animals are cattle, sheep and horses. Other domestic animals include pigs, goats, dogs, cats, hens, geese, ducks, turkeys and pigeons.

All counted, 241 kinds of birds are known to have visited Iceland at one time or another. Of these 72 nest regularly, 6 are common passage migrants, about 30 are regular drift migrant or winter visitors, the rest being accidental. Sea birds, waterfowl, and waders are the most common indigenous birds. The most celebrated is the Iceland gyrfalcon which in former times was highly prized and exported all over Europe and even to the East. It is now fully protected throughout the year. The huge white-tailed eagle is now rare and also fully protected. The third indigenous bird of prey is the merlin. The rock ptarmigan (the most important game bird) and the eider duck are quite common, the latter being the object of the ancient eider duck farming. It is now rigorously protected by law.

There are two species of owls, one of them having come to Iceland

since the turn of the century owing to milder climatic conditions. Eight other "newcomers" in this century are the shoveller, the tufted duck, the pochard, the lesser black-backed gull, the herring gull, the common gull, the black-headed gull, and the starling.

Nesting passerines are represented by merely nine species, no doubt mainly due to the scarcity of trees and insect life. The raven, the snow bunting, the redpoll, and the wren are resident species, while the meadow pipit, the white wagtail, the redwing, and the wheatear are common summer visitors. The starling has established itself in Iceland since 1940, but its breeding range is restricted. The swallow, the fieldfare, and the house sparrow have tried to breed in Iceland, but have not yet become permanent settlers.

The most common waders in Iceland are the golden plover and the whimbrel. Other common waders include the snipe, the redshank, the dunlin, the purple sandpiper, the ringed plover, the oystercatcher, the rednecked phalarope, and, less common, the black-tailed godwit and the grey phalarope.

Iceland is one of the major breeding grounds of waterfowl in Europe, and Lake Mývatn is renowned for its abundance of waterfowl. There are no fewer than 16

species of ducks, or every species known to nest in Iceland, including two American species, Barrow's goldeneye and the harlequin duck. The geese are represented by two nesting species and three passage migrants. Iceland is one of the few places where the whooper swan is still a common breeding bird. It is most numerous on lakes lying on the borders of the central highlands.

On the towering bird cliffs along the coasts of Iceland the most important colonial sea birds are the common guillemot, Brünnich's guillemot, the razorbill, the puffin, the kittiwake, the fulmar, and the gannet. All these birds have been caught for human consumption and the eggs of some of them have also been taken for the same purpose.

About 800 species of insects have been recorded in Iceland. As in other arctic and subarctic countries the Diptera (flies, gnats, and midges) form the largest and most important group. Coleoptera (beetles) and Hymenoptera (bees and allies) are also fairly numerous, but ants are non-existent. Moths are the only fully indigenous representatives of the Lepidoptera. A few species of migratory butterflies, such as the red admiral and the painted lady, sometimes come



to Iceland in goodly numbers, but never survive the winter. There are no reptiles or amphibians in Iceland.

Icelandic rivers abound in salmon, and trout and char are plentiful in lakes and streams. Two other species of fresh-water fish are also to be found, the eel and the three-spined stickleback. None of these five species are really fresh-water fish, but represent marine species that are establishing themselves in fresh water.

Plankton in Icelandic waters provides optimum conditions for a rich marine fauna. Salt-water fish number about 150 species, including cod, haddock, herring, Norway haddock, halibut, whiting, saithe, ling, plaice and lemon sole, which together form the basis of large-scale coastal fisheries. Only 66 of the 150 species are known with certainty to propagate in Icelandic waters, the others being migratory visitors or stragglers from oceanic waters. Shrimp and lobster fishing has lately become a lucrative occupation in some parts of the country.

Weather

Sayings like "There is no weather in Iceland, only samples" or "If you don't like our weather, just wait a minute" indicate the variability of

the Icelandic climate. It is cool temperate and oceanic, influenced by the country's location in the boundary zone between two different air currents, the one of polar, the other of tropical origin (separated by the polar front), and by the confluence of two different ocean currents, the Gulf Stream flowing clockwise around the south and west coasts and the East Greenland polar current curving south-eastwards round the north and east coasts, the two currents meeting off the southeast coast. A third element affecting the climate is the arctic drift ice brought by the polar current, which occasionally blocks the north and east coasts in late winter and early spring. The advance of drift ice causes a considerable fall in the temperature and usually some decrease in precipitation.

Considering the northerly location of Iceland, its climate is much milder than might be expected, especially in winter. The mean annual temperature for Reykjavík is 5°C. (41°F), the average January temperature being - 0.4° C. (31.4°F) and July 11.2° C. (52.2°F.). Corresponding figures for Akureyri in the north are 3.9° C. (39°F.), - 1.5° C. (29.3°F.) and 10.9°C. (51.6°F.). The wettest regions are in the south and southeast. The annual precipitation



of *Kvisker* is 120 in. or more than 3000 mm. and is the highest recorded along the coast, but on the southern slopes of Vatnajökull it may be appreciably higher, whereas in the highlands north of Vatnajökull it drops to 16 in. (400 mm.) or less.

The weather in Iceland is on the whole quite changeable and depends mostly on the tracks of the atmospheric depressions crossing the North Atlantic. The passage of a depression some distance south of Iceland causes relatively cold and dry weather, especially in northern districts, while one passing northeastward between Iceland and Greenland brings mild weather, moderately dry in the north.

Coastal areas in Iceland tend to be windy, gales are common, especially in winter, but thunderstorms are extremely rare. Fogs are rather uncommon except in the coastal districts of the east and northeast and the air is generally marvellously clear. The Northern Lights are often to be seen, especially in autumn and early winter. For two to three months in summer there is continuous daylight in Iceland, and early spring and late autumn enjoy long twilights. The really dark period (three to four hours daylight) lasts from about mid-November until the end of January.

Winter scenes can be just as beautiful as summer idylls.





The Icelanders

Population

Iceland was settled by a mixed stock of Norsemen from Scandinavia and Celts from the British Isles. The ruling class was Nordic, so that both the language and culture of Iceland were purely Scandinavian from the outset, but there are traces of Celtic influence in some of the Eddic poems, in personal names and in the appearance of present-day Icelanders who have a higher percentage of the dark-haired type than the other Nordic nations. Moreover, recent blood group investigations suggest a closer affinity with the Celts in Ireland and Scotland than with the Scandinavians, group O being predominant in Iceland and Ireland, whereas group A prevails in Norway and Denmark. The early blending of Nordic and Celtic blood may partly explain the fact that the Icelanders, alone of all the Nordic peoples, produced great literature in the Middle Ages. Immigration of foreign elements has been negligible since the first settlement, and there are no Eskimos in Iceland, contrary to common belief.

Iceland is the most sparsely populated country in Europe with an average of 2 inhabitants per square kilometre (Norway comes second with 11 inhabitants per sq. km.) Almost four-fifths of the country are uninhabited and mostly uninhabitable, the settlements being limited to a narrow coastal belt, valleys and the lowland plains in the south and southeast.

Around the year 1100 the population, then entirely rural, is estimated to have been about 70–80,000. Three times in the eighteenth century it sank below 40,000, but by the year 1900 it had reached 78,000. In 1925 it had passed the 100,000 mark, and in 1968 it reached 200,000. The birth rate is one of the highest in Europe, and the death rate one of the lowest in the world (7 per thousand). Infant mortality is also lower than in most countries, or about 15 for every thousand births. Illegitimacy is higher in Iceland than in other European countries or about 25 per cent, but a large number of such children are later legitimised by the marriage of their parents. In a number of cases parents live



*Icelandic girls, with their Nordic features,
have a reputation for beauty.*

together without formal marriage.

The average life expectancy for men is 71 years and for women 75 years. There are about 2,000 more males than females in Iceland.

In 1880 there were only three towns in Iceland, where 5 per cent of the population lived. By 1920 about 43 per cent of the population lived in towns and villages with more than 300 inhabitants. By 1967 there were 14 towns and 40 villages where 85.3 per cent of the population lived, while 14.7 per cent lived in rural districts.

History

The first people known to have visited Iceland were Irish monks or hermits who came in the eighth century, but left with the arrival of the pagan Norsemen, who systematically settled Iceland in the period 870–930 A.D. Iceland was thus the last European country to be settled. In 930 the *Althing* (General Assembly) was formed at *Thingvellir*, inaugurating the so-called Icelandic Commonwealth, made up of 39 independent chieftaincies, which lasted until 1262, when Iceland came under Norwegian rule. In the year 1000 Christianity was peacefully adopted by the Icelanders at the *Althing*, which met for two weeks every summer, attracting a

large proportion of the population. The first bishopric was established at *Skálholt* in South Iceland in 1056 and a second at *Hólar* in the north in 1106. Both became the country's main centres of learning.

In the late tenth century Greenland was discovered and colonized by the Icelanders under the leadership of Eirik the Red, and around the year 1000 the Icelanders were the first Europeans to set foot on the American continent (Leif Eiriksson), 500 years before Columbus, although their attempts to settle in the New World failed.

After the collapse of the Commonwealth conditions in Iceland gradually deteriorated owing to harsher climate, natural disasters, lack of ships and economic resources. Agriculture declined and the rich fishing grounds were exploited by foreigners. In 1380 Iceland with Norway came under the Danish king, with the result that royal agents increased their meddling in internal affairs. Both the sees were occupied by foreigners in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. In 1402 the Black Death ravaged Iceland, probably killing off two-thirds of the population.

The Reformation was imposed by the Danish king and the last Catholic bishop, *Jón Arason*, beheaded without trial along with

Historical Dates

- 870–930 Settlement of Iceland
- 930 Establishment of the *Althing* and the Commonwealth
- 930–1030 *Saga Age*
- 982 Greenland discovered by Eirik the Red
- 1000 Conversion to Christianity
- 1000 North American continent discovered by Leif Eiriksson
- 1030–1120 *Age of Peace*
- 1120–1230 *Age of Writing*
- 1230–1264 *Sturlung Age*
- 1241 Snorri Sturluson killed
- 1262–1264 Iceland comes under Norwegian rule
- 1380 Iceland with Norway comes under Danish rule
- 1402–1404 Black Death
- 1540 1550 The Reformation
- 1602 Royal trade monopoly
- 1662 Absolutism enforced
- 1783–1785 The disastrous Lakagígar eruption
- 1787 Trade freed to Danish subjects
- 1800 The *Althing* dissolved
- 1809 The Danish adventurer Jørgen Jørgensen seizes power in Iceland
- 1818 The National Library founded
- 1843 The *Althing* re-established as a consultative body
- 1854 Foreign trade entirely freed
- 1861 The National Museum founded
- 1874 Milenary of first settlement; the first constitution granted by the king
- 1879 Jón Sigurdsson dies
- 1904 Home rule
- 1906 Submarine telegraph cable from Scotland to Iceland
- 1911 The University of Iceland founded
- 1918 Iceland gains sovereignty
- 1920 The Supreme Court founded
- 1930 Millenary of the *Althing* celebrated
- 1940 Iceland occupied by British forces
- 1941 United States forces take over defence of Iceland
- 1944 The Republic of Iceland founded at Thingvellir
- 1945 First international flight by Icelandic aircraft
- 1946 Iceland joins the United Nations
- 1947 Iceland founding member of OEEC (in 1961 changed into OECD)
- 1949 Iceland joins NATO
- 1950 Iceland joins Council of Europe
- 1950 The National Theatre and the Symphony Orchestra founded
- 1951 Defence agreement between the United States and Iceland
- 1952 Iceland joins Nordic Council
- 1952 Iceland fishery limits extended to 4 miles
- 1958 Iceland fishery limits extended to 12 miles
- 1962 Radio-telephone submarine cable from Scotland to Iceland
- 1963 Radio-telephone submarine cable from Iceland to Canada
- 1965 Treaty between Iceland and Denmark on the delivery of Icelandic manuscripts in Copenhagen
- 1970 Iceland joins EFTA
- 1971 Arrival of first Icelandic manuscripts from Copenhagen

two of his sons in 1550. All church property was confiscated by the king, who thus greatly increased his power and in 1602 imposed Danish trade monopoly with severe penalties. In 1662 the Icelanders were forced to accept his absolute monarchy.

The eighteenth century was the darkest age in Iceland's history. In 1703, when the first complete census was taken, the population was approximately 50,000, of whom about 20 per cent were beggars and dependants. From 1707 to 1709 the population sank to about 35,000 because of a serious smallpox epidemic. Again it declined below 40,000 both in the years 1752-57 and 1783-85, owing to famine and natural disasters. At the end of the century the *Althing* had been dissolved (it had functioned as a judicial body since the thirteenth century) and the old sees replaced by one bishop residing in Reykjavík. As a consequence of the plight of the populace the trade monopoly was modified in 1787 and all subjects of the Danish king given the right to trade in Iceland.

In 1809 a Danish adventurer, Jörgen Jörgensen, aided by a London merchant, seized power in Iceland and proclaimed himself self-styled ruler, but was soon removed by a British warship. After the

Old tapestries are some of the valuable historical relics.

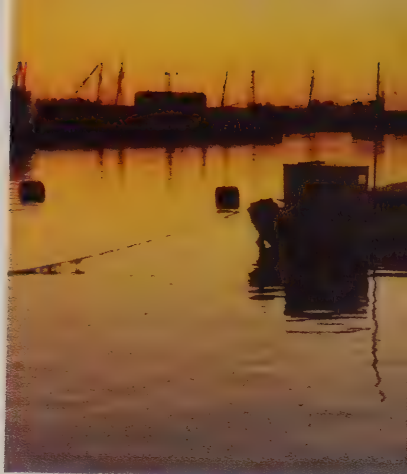




Napoleonic wars conditions began to improve, and towards the middle of the nineteenth century the political struggle for greater autonomy began in earnest under the leadership of *Jón Sigurdsson* (1811–1879), now Iceland's National Hero. In 1843 the *Althing* was reinstituted as a consultative assembly. In 1854 foreign trade was given entirely free. In 1874, when Iceland celebrated the millenary of the first settlement, it received a constitution from the Danish king and control of its own finances. In 1904 it got home rule and in 1918 sovereignty, but was united with Denmark under the Danish crown. In 1940 Iceland was occupied by British forces, which were replaced in 1941 by American ones by special agreement between the Icelandic and American governments, and on 17 June 1944, the anniversary of the birth of *Jón Sigurdsson*, the Republic of Iceland was formally proclaimed at Thingvellir.

Reykjavík

Reykjavík, the most northerly metropolis in the world, just north of the 64th parallel, is located where the first permanent settler of Iceland, *Ingólf Arnarson*, made his home in 874, according to *Saga* tradition. Reykjavík only became



Aerial view of Reykjavik, with the Lake and old town centre (lower), Reykjavik harbour, bathed in the rays of the midnight sun (upper)





*Modern dwelling-house in Reykjavik (upper).
Old church at the Árbaer
folk museum in Reykjavik (lower).*

an independent township, with 167 inhabitants, in 1786, but has now a population of well over 80,000. More than half the population of Iceland lives in the capital and the adjoining towns, so that here lies the very heart of the country. A completely smokeless city, with a beautiful lake in its old centre, Reykjavík is a bustling hub of commerce and government, industry and culture. It houses all the official government institutions, the libraries and the museums, the higher education and research institutions, the communications headquarters (radio, television and newspapers), the theatres and orchestras, the law courts, open-air swimming pools and sports stadiums, the shipping lines, air and bus companies, factories and processing plants. It is in effect the powerhouse of Iceland's recent prosperity, although many people feel it should not grow quite so fast.

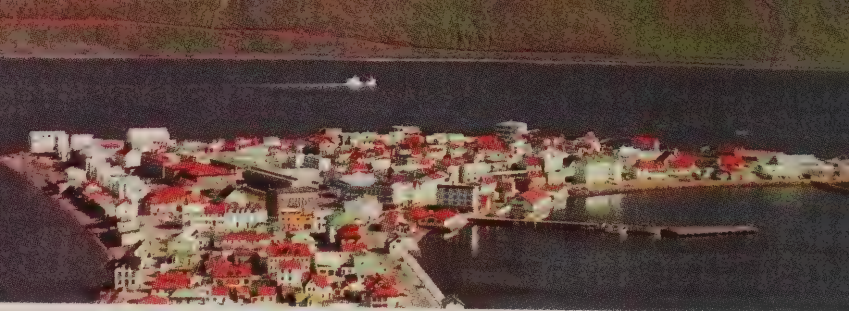
Among the most conspicuous buildings in Reykjavík are the Parliament House (built in 1881) and the old Government Building (from the mid-eighteenth century), both in the Old Centre of Reykjavík between the harbour and the lake. Close by are the National Library and the National Theatre, standing side by side behind a statue of the first settler. In the University

Area there is the University itself and its student hostels, the National Museum and the Nordic House (designed by worldfamed Finnish architect Alvar Aalto). There are a number of old and new churches, amongst them the old cathedral close to Parliament House and the towering new Hallgrímskirkja, named after Iceland's most beloved hymn writer. Two of the hotels are also conspicuous, and so are a number of school buildings and modern apartment houses.

The Folk Museum of Árbaer, in one of the eastern suburbs, exhibits a number of old Reykjavík houses, reconstructed in the original style, as well as a traditional country church and farmhouse, both turf-roofed, from the turn of the century. Most remarkable of all, one of Iceland's best salmon rivers runs right through the eastern sector of the capital.

Main Towns

Outside the Reykjavík area the habitation is much less dense and spread all round the country with a few important towns in each quarter. In North Iceland the largest town is Akureyri (pop. 10,800), the "capital" of that part of the country and the second most significant town in Iceland. It is an important



Ísafjörður, main town in the Western Fiords

industrial centre, being the stronghold of the Co-operative Movement, and also plays a leading role in commerce, communications, tourism, culture and education. Along the same fiord are located the former "herring capital" Siglufjörður (pop. 2,160), Ólafsfjörður (pop. 1,100), and Dalvík (pop. 1,060). In the Skagafjörður district the largest town is Saudárkrókur (pop. 1,600), a growing industrial and cultural centre.

In the northwest corner of Iceland the largest towns are Ísafjörður (pop. 2,700) and Patreksfjörður (pop. 1,000), both of them fishing communities, and the former also a cultural and educational centre.

East Iceland is much more sparsely populated than North Iceland. The biggest towns there are Húsavík (pop. 1,990) in the north, Neskaupstaður (pop. 1,550), and Seydisfjörður (pop. 900), formerly the "capital" of East Iceland.

The southwest corner of Iceland is most densely populated with Reykjavík as the centre of gravity. Bordering on Reykjavík is the town of Kópavogur (pop. 11,160), and a few miles farther south lies Hafnarfjörður (pop. 9,700). Close to the international airport lies the town of Keflavík (pop. 5,660). Across the bay from Reykjavík lies Akranes (pop. 4,250) with its large cement plant, and a little further north lies Borgarnes (pop. 1,160), the commercial centre of the fertile Borgarfjörður district. These five towns along with Reykjavík make up more than half the population of Iceland. On the fertile southern plain there are four rural towns (a fifth is to be found in East Iceland), the most important of which is Selfoss (pop. 2,400) with the largest dairy in Iceland. The insular town of the Vestmann Islands has already been mentioned, a bustling fishing centre with over 5,000 inhabitants.



View of the harbour at Akureyri.

Political System

Executive power is vested in the President of the Republic and the Government. Administration is in the hands of the cabinet. Legislative power lies with the President and the *Althing*. Judicial power lies with the lower courts and the Supreme Court. Elections are held every four years, and all citizens over 20 may vote. The President is elected by a direct ballot. There have been three Presidents so far, Sveinn Björnsson (1944–1952), Ásgeir Ásgeirsson (1952–1968), and Kristján Eldjárn (since 1968).

From mid-1959 the *Althing* has been composed of 60 members, 37 chosen from five- or six-member constituencies, 12 from the capital, and up to 11 supplementary members allotted to parties with fewer seats than their proportional voting strength calls for. The *Althing* is divided into a lower (two-thirds of the members) and upper chamber with equal constitutional power, but on occasion both chambers work together. The Budget and other financial bills are introduced in the United *Althing*. Ordinary bills are discussed three times in each chamber. If the chambers cannot agree, the bill comes before the United *Althing* where it has to





receive at least two-thirds of the votes to be passed. Having received the signature of the President and one cabinet minister, a bill has the force of law. An amendment of the Constitution is followed by a dissolution of the Althing and new elections, after which the amendment has to be accepted by the newly elected assembly. Any alteration with regard to the church establishment in Iceland must be submitted to a plebiscite. There are seven cabinet ministers heading thirteen ministries, including the Premier's Office.

No party has ever been able to command a clear majority in parliamentary elections. There are five political parties represented in the Althing, the largest being the Independence Party founded in 1929. Next in size is the Progressive Party founded in 1916. The three other parties are the Social-Democratic Party, founded in 1916, the People's Alliance founded in 1968, and the Alliance of Liberals and Leftists, founded in 1969.

Iceland is divided into 16 districts or counties, each of which is administered by a district magistrate, and 14 towns, each administered by a town magistrate. In all there are about 230 local and municipal bodies. Each district has its own council where every parish has one

representative. In municipal councils the number of representatives varies from seven to fifteen, but parish councils have three to seven members.

The ordinary judicial court has two instances, the lower courts presided over by the magistrates, and the Supreme Court in Reykjavík composed of five judges. In the capital there is a special judge for the lower criminal court and another for the civil court. There are special courts for cases of maritime law, for labour disputes and other similar matters. The office of State Prosecutor was created in 1961. Juries are never employed in trials of criminal cases.

Foreign Service

Until 1918 Iceland's relations with the outside world were under Danish control. After gaining sovereignty in 1918 Iceland had a minister in Copenhagen from 1920 and was entitled to nominate attachés at Danish embassies abroad. Since 1944 Iceland has been entirely in control of her foreign affairs, and indeed World War II had imposed this responsibility on the Icelandic government already in 1940 after the German occupation of Denmark. In 1941 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was formally estab-

*Distances across the ocean to other lands
used to be great. Modern means
of communication have changed this.*



lished. It is headed by the Foreign Minister, but directed by a Secretary General who is a civil servant and not a political appointee. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is divided into a General Division, an International Division, an Inform-

ation and Cultural Division, and a Defence Division dealing with all matters relating to the NATO base at Keflavík, which has been operated since 1951 in accordance with a bi-lateral agreement between Iceland and the United States.

During World War II Iceland established diplomatic relations with the other Nordic countries as well as with the United Kingdom, the United States, the Soviet Union, and the Free French Forces under the leadership of General de Gaulle. Since the war Iceland has established diplomatic relations with some 41 countries and has nine embassies abroad: in Belgium, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Norway, the Soviet Union, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The nine ambassadors accredited in these countries are concurrently accredited to the other countries with which Iceland has diplomatic ties. There are also permanent delegations at NATO and EFTA and the Icelandic delegation at the U.N. is headed by an ambassador.

Iceland has consular representatives at about 110 places in various countries all over the world.

In 1946 Iceland joined the United Nations and has from the beginning been a member of the OEEC (now OECD), the Council of Europe, NATO, and several of the international organizations affiliated to the United Nations, such as the International Monetary Fund, the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development, the International Finance Corporation, the

International Development Association, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization, the International Labour Organization and others. Later Iceland joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, UNESCO, and in 1970 the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

Iceland has engaged in one international dispute since 1944, with Britain over the extension of Iceland's fishery limits to 4 miles in 1952 and to 12 miles in 1958, which caused very strained relations at the time (the famous "cod war"), but was settled by an agreement in February 1961, Britain accepting the 12-mile limit with certain temporary reservations.

Culture

Iceland is world famous for her medieval literature, especially the so-called *Sagas of Icelanders*, realistic and secular prose novels written in the vernacular in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, constituting the sole original contribution of the Nordic countries to world literature. These Sagas are amazingly modern in style, approach and subject matter, dealing with the lives, characters, daily life and exploits of leading Icelanders of

the tenth and eleventh centuries. They have been translated into a large number of foreign languages and have appeared in many English versions, notably *Njal's Saga*, *Egil's Saga*, *The Laxdaela Saga*, *The Saga of Gisli* and *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*.

Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241), the greatest historian of the Middle Ages, wrote the history of the kings of Norway in his world renowned *Heimskringla* (Orb of the World) and a textbook in poetics in his so-called *Prose Edda*. He was probably also the author of *Egil's Saga*, the story of the Viking-poet Egil Skallagrímsson, one of the great innovators in Scandinavian poetry, who lived in West Iceland in the tenth century.

The heroic and mythological poetry of the so-called *Poetic Edda* is the only extant source of the beliefs, cosmology, and outlook of the Germanic peoples in pre-Christian times, to which among others Richard Wagner turned for his subject matter in *Ring der Nibelungen*. The Eddic poems in their present form were composed between ca. 800 and 1200, but portions of them might date back to the sixth century. The *Poetic Edda* takes its place alongside such heroic and mythological epics as the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabha-*

rata, the *Gilgamesh Epic* and the *Kalevala*.

After the collapse of the Icelandic Commonwealth in the late thirteenth century the literature gradually declined and did not really revive until the nineteenth century, except for a brief spell in the seventeenth century dominated by the brilliant hymn-writer *Hallgrímur Pétursson* (1614–1674) whose *Passion Hymns* have appeared in over 50 editions, breaking all Icelandic publishing records.

The Romantic movement, coinciding with the national awakening of the nineteenth century, produced a long line of very fine poets who celebrated the glorious past of the Commonwealth, the natural beauties of Iceland, recreating the language and urging the people to awake to a new age of hope and brighter prospects. The most beloved of the Romantic poets was *Jónas Hallgrímsson* (1807–1845), a superb master of language and a sensitive naturalist. The nineteenth-century tradition in Icelandic poetry was not seriously broken until after World War II, when *Steinn Steinarr* (1908–1958) and his spiritual descendants introduced a radically new way of expressing the poetic vision, freer in form, more subtle and introvert.

The novel was resurrected in Iceland about the middle of the

nineteenth century by *Jón Thoroddsen* (1819–1868), who was followed in the early twentieth century by many fine novelists, culminating in *Halldór Laxness* (b. 1902) who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1955. A number of Icelanders early in this century wrote their major works in Danish, best known of them being the dramatist *Jóhann Sigurjónsson* (1880–1919) and the novelist *Gunnar Gunnarsson* (b. 1889).

The Icelanders in general are avid readers, and the annual number of books published per capita in Iceland is greater than anywhere else in the world.

The other arts have also flourished in this century, especially painting, which started in earnest at the turn of the century with three outstanding pioneers, and to a lesser degree sculpture and music.

Since 1897 the Reykjavík Theatre Company has been a repertory theatre, staging Icelandic and foreign plays, many of them of high quality. In 1950 the National Theatre in Reykjavík was opened. It is run by the State and presents 8–10 productions annually, including musicals and operas. The Conservatory of Music was founded in 1930, and in 1950 the National Symphony Orchestra started operating in conjunction with the State

Radio and the National Theatre. It gives fortnightly concerts through the winter. The State Radio was founded in 1930, and under its auspices Icelandic television began telecasting in late 1966.

The National Library was founded in 1818, and there are good public libraries in all towns and most villages. There is a National Museum in Reykjavík as well as a State Gallery, housed in the same premises, in addition to several galleries of painting and sculpture. There are five daily newspapers in Iceland, a few weeklies, one illustrated weekly, and several cultural periodicals in addition to the English-language quarterly, *Atlantica & Iceland Review*.

Since the early eighteenth century most of the ancient Icelandic manuscripts were preserved in Copenhagen. After achieving independence the Icelanders demanded their return, and in 1965 a treaty was signed between Denmark and Iceland regarding the delivery of the manuscripts. However, owing to legal tangles, the first manuscripts did not arrive in Iceland until April 1971. They were the two most valuable ones, brought to Iceland by a prominent Danish delegation.

The Icelandic manuscripts are an Icelandic national heritage.

ok daga in þ skip upp adan. þa alþvagr
 h þ æ. þa at uds tjs eds þong brian ik
 up. þy vnd in eds þengr heyr upp. þ ne
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 þalli ak ne eng. ok up þ þ skada lū er
 þa iogd a. **R. S. C. R.** Egi mltū vœt
 at mikil skreid þlitz hedan ap lðmu



meðu hallæri er.
 h heyr hū i l
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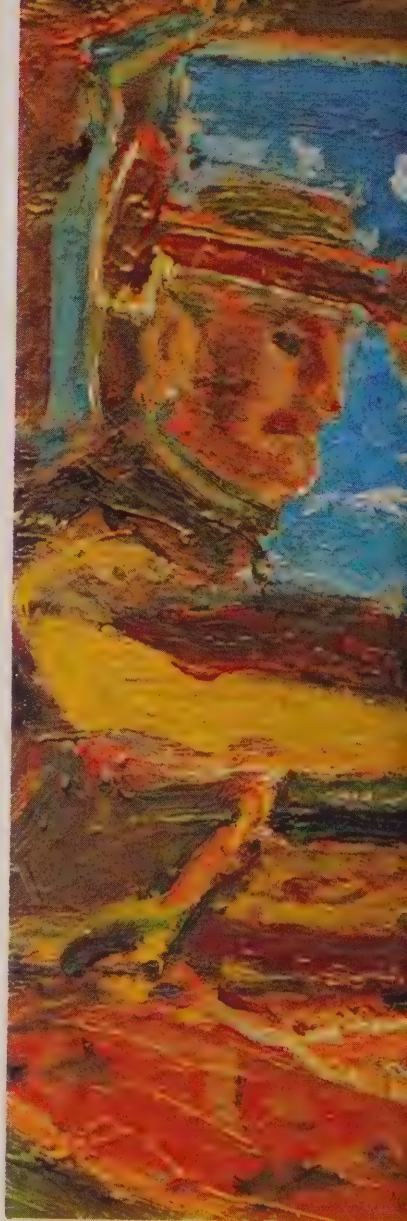
nu þ uætt. at uak if engi anan stela.
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 se hrugditt lūki a k m h m. þu steli h m
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 taki vi. m. ap þe tjs. Eū ey la in h m lām
 i steli optas. þa er h dæpr. Eū ey lām
 steli til m k er eka v þr at þyfsku keda
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 v. kgi. eða þi ut lægr sem þig m tōma.
 E u ey h steli optas. þa er h dæpr. þ ne
 þrogr steli til u. mka. i þta lūgi. þa he
 þ h þ stalt lausa þe s m m tollu. Eū ey h
 æ i iandū. þa m m m til m m. mka. ok h
 þi at ads llika repþing. sem la m legr æ
 h. er kgs ualbo heþ i hdi til ræt repþing
 a. ok hallm þo h m m. Eū ey la h m lām
 i steli optas. þa heþ h þ stalt. lli ok lō
 lū eyri. ok h m m m. þa þnebr er la m

Education

Literacy has been general in Iceland since the end of the eighteenth century. In 1907 school attendance was made obligatory for all children aged 10–14; before the age of 10 they were generally taught at home. In 1946 compulsory school attendance was extended, and at present it covers the ages between 7 and 15. Children aged 7–13 attend primary schools, and at 14–15 go to junior schools. The junior or middle school has two branches, one emphasizing study from books, the other stressing practical work. Those who wish to continue their education either go to the various specialized schools or to high schools.

Academic education in the full sense did not begin in Iceland until 1847 with the formation of a Theological Seminary. It was followed in 1877 by a Medical School and in 1908 by a School of Law. These three institutions were merged into one in 1911 when the University of Iceland was established on the centenary of the birth of Jón Sigurdsson, and a fourth Faculty of Philosophy added, primarily dealing with Icelandic philology, history and literature. The University building was opened in 1940, since when there has been continual ex-



*Painting is a flourishing art
– part of a picture by Gunnlaugur Scheving*



pansion. Departments of dental surgery and pharmacy were added in 1941 and 1957 respectively to the Faculty of Medicine. Economics, with the accent on business administration, was added to the Faculty of Law in 1941, but is an independent Faculty now. In the same year a Faculty of Engineering was inaugurated to provide education for the first half of the final degree in civil engineering, after which students must complete their studies abroad. Within the Faculty of Philosophy it is now possible to take the B.A. degree in subjects like English, French, German, Latin, Greek, all the Nordic languages, physics, mathematics, chemistry, etc.

Various research and experimental institutions and stations work in co-operation with the University. The University Library is the second largest in the country after the National Library. A Manuscript Institute was founded in 1967 after an agreement had been reached between Danish and Icelandic authorities, securing the return of the great bulk of precious Icelandic manuscripts, preserved in Copenhagen since the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The collection includes most of the extant manuscripts of ancient Icelandic literature.



*On the stage Icelanders can see classical work
as well as the latest play
from both sides of the Atlanti*



*There have been many interesting
developments in sculpture
– "Through the Sound Barrier", by Asmundur Sveinsson.*



Social Affairs

Since World War II Iceland has enjoyed an extremely high living standard, in many respects comparable to that of the other Nordic countries. From 1901 to 1960 real national income rose ten-fold with an annual average rate of growth of just over 4 per cent. This period witnessed the change from medieval to modern living conditions with enormous structural changes in the national economy, transforming it from a subsistence into an exchange economy. This was accompanied by rapid urbanization and other features of industrialization. The quality of housing in Iceland is probably higher than anywhere else, while the Icelandic roads are poorer than in most countries with a comparable living standard, mainly due to the size of the country and the sparsity of the population.

The first trade union, a seamen's association, was founded in 1894, but the first union of skilled workers was the Icelandic Printers' Union, founded in 1897. During World War I trade unions began to make themselves felt, and in 1916 the Icelandic Federation of Labour was formed. It now includes some 140 unions and groups with about 35,000 members. An Employers'

Association was founded in 1934. Strikes have been frequent in recent decades. Since 1930 many laws have been passed to ensure the fair treatment and safety of workers in many fields. Since 1964 every worker has a minimum vacation of 21 days. Since 1932 child welfare councils have been operating.

The Co-operative Movement in Iceland started in 1882 and played from the outset a significant role in replacing foreign vested interests with Icelandic initiative. There are 50 co-operative societies all around the country with a total membership of about 30,000. In 1902 the societies were united in the Federation of Iceland Co-operative So-

cieties, which has developed into the largest concern in Iceland with many industrial plants, factories, freezing plants, also being active in import and export and various other fields.

The Temperance Movement started in Iceland in 1884 and has since become quite influential with a membership of about 10,000. Prohibition was in force from 1909 to 1935, with the exception of wines from 1922. Strong beer is still prohibited. The Suffragette Movement began in the late nineteenth century. In 1882 women were given partial right to vote in local elections and received full rights in 1908. Since 1915 they have enjoyed



The Water-Carrier, a sculpture by Ásmundur Sveinsson.

general suffrage. The Boy Scout Movement was founded in 1912 and has some 4,000 members. Youth Clubs began to be formed early in this century on Norwegian and Danish models and have played an important cultural and social role in rural districts. The National Life-Saving Association has branches all over Iceland and life-saving stations at various points. It has been instrumental in saving hundreds of foreign and Icelandic seamen, frequently under very difficult conditions.

The first national plan for social insurance came into operation in 1936. It has often been revised, and since 1947 it is compulsory for every citizen, covering old age, disability, industrial accidents, maternity benefits, sickness, children's annuities, family allowances, and benefits to mothers and widows. Unemployment insurance was introduced in 1956.

Health coverage, however, is not complete, and patients pay part of their medical care and most dental care. The country is divided into 57 medical districts, and there are about 50 hospitals, some of them quite small. The district physicians are at once general medical practitioners and responsible for the supervision of sanitation and public hygiene in their districts. There is one physician to every 750 people,

and more than half of the doctors work in Reykjavík. There are many voluntary organizations combatting various diseases, such as cancer, heart diseases, mental ills, alcoholism, poliomyelitis, and tuberculosis. Some of them run rehabilitation centres for convalescents, most famous of which is the tuberculosis rehabilitation centre at Reykjalundur, 10 miles east of Reykjavík, with workshops and individual lodgings, a unique institution. Until the 1930's tuberculosis was one of the biggest killers in Iceland, but through an intensive nation-wide campaign it has been almost wiped out. The same is true of leprosy which was quite common at one time. There is one mental hospital in Iceland, located in Reykjavík. The Red Cross in Iceland has been active in various fields; it has provided town children with summer vacation homes out in the countryside, but its most important work has been in helping to provide relief for children and other people in distress in many foreign countries.

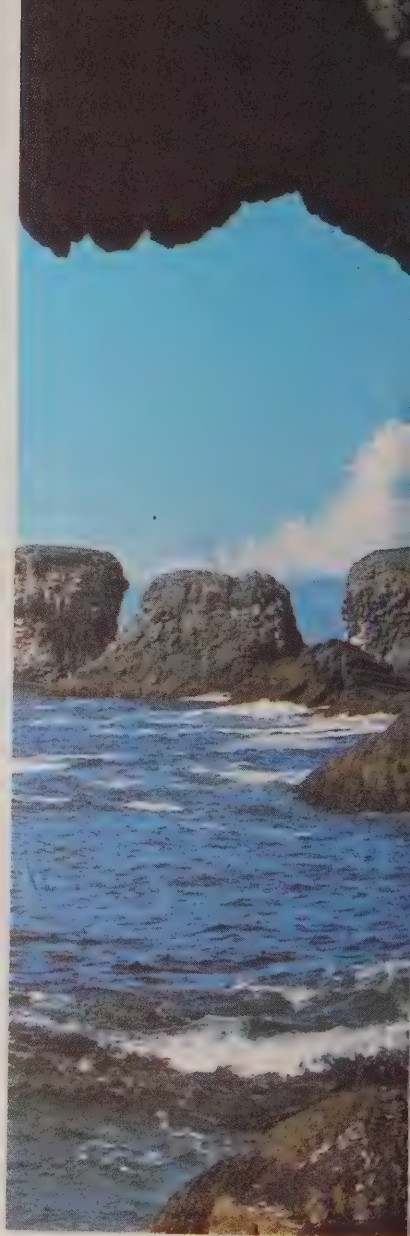
Fishing Industry

In addition to the grasslands which form the basis of agriculture, and the water power and geothermal energy supporting the rapid industrialization, by far the most



important natural resource of the Icelanders are the country's very rich fishing banks, which in a real and literal sense constitute the very foundation of Iceland's economy. Fish and marine products have for a long time amounted to about 90 per cent of Iceland's exports (81.9 per cent in 1969), and the fishing industry is Iceland's major industry. About one fifth of the country's Gross National Product is derived from the fishing industry (20 per cent in 1965, 15 per cent in 1969). Foreign trade makes up between 45 and 50 per cent of the GNP (47.2 per cent in 1969; 48.8 per cent in 1970). Iceland has no mineral or fuel resources and must import most of her vital foodstuffs and raw materials, all of which are paid for by the export of fish and marine products.

In the light of these facts it should be clear that the Icelanders are more dependent on fisheries than any other independent nation in the world. This is also the principal reason why Iceland has so unswervingly and strenuously held forth her right to protect and preserve the coastal fishing by extending her fisheries jurisdiction to 50 nautical miles and the pollution jurisdiction to 100 miles from base lines. The 50-miles fishe-



*Nature has many forms
— especially on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula.*



ries jurisdiction roughly corresponds to jurisdiction over the superjacent waters of the continental shelf.

The two overriding reasons for the Icelandic Government's decision to extend the fishery limits in 1972 to 50 miles (having extended them from 3 to 4 miles in 1952 and to 12 miles in 1958) were on the other hand the urgent need to conserve the fish stocks in Icelandic waters that supply the Atlantic Ocean, and on the other hand the vital economic needs of the Icelandic nation.

The need for conservation had gradually become ever more evident. Without the Icelandic initiative to protect the important spawning areas of the continental shelf, which extends 50–70 miles from the coasts, Iceland as well as Britain, Germany, the Soviet Union and other nations fishing in Icelandic waters, would in the long run be the losers, as was already indicated by the harm done to the haddock and herring stocks in these waters.

One indication of this was the fact that herring catches in Iceland dropped from 812.7 thousand tons in 1965 to 50.7 thousand tons in 1970, while the drop in the haddock catch by Iceland was from 53,506 tons in 1965 to 35,036 tons

in 1969. The figures for the total catch of haddock in Icelandic waters by Iceland, Britain, Germany, the Soviet Union, France, Belgium and other nations fishing in these waters were 110,086 tons in 1961 and 46,613 tons in 1969.

Cod being by far the most important species in Icelandic fisheries in recent years, it was only natural that the Icelanders should be alarmed at the evidence that cod was being overfished. Scientists demonstrated beyond all doubt that the total mortality in the spawning population of cod was over 70 per cent annually in 1970–1971, and that fishing was responsible for four fifths of this amount. The average age of the spawning stock had been sharply reduced. Fish over 10 years of age were extremely rare, whereas in 1950–1955 fish up to 15 years old were not unusual. Thus the increased fishing effort (with ever better equipment) had drastically reduced the spawning potential of the cod stock. The cod is in a way similar to the salmon or capelin, the greatest part of the stock now having the possibility to spawn only once in its lifetime, the biological implications of which are bound to be very negative for the survival of the stock.

The fact that Icelandic fishermen

take only about half of the total catch in Icelandic waters and that on the average 100 foreign vessels were fishing in these waters during the monthly survey taken by the Icelandic Coast Guard during 1963–1970 (there were 103 foreign vessels between August 1970 and July 1971), was a clear indication that strict conservation measures had to be taken by Iceland, both inside the fisheries jurisdiction and beyond the fishery limits, based on the regional and/or international agreements.

It was not until the end of the last century that fishing became such an important industry in Iceland. About 1890 decked vessels began to be used in considerable numbers for cod fishing, and shortly afterwards herring fishing was developed. These have been the most important species caught around Iceland. Various other valuable species are caught around Iceland, such as haddock, ocean perch, saithe, catfish, ling, halibut, plaice, lemon sole, and capelin. Whaling has also been a lucrative occupation during the summer months.

About 20 per cent of the population derive their living from the fisheries and the related processing industries, of whom about half are directly dependent on fishing. From about 1930 fish on ice was

exported to Britain and Germany, but after World War II the quick-freezing industry expanded greatly, and quick-frozen fish is now a major export. Stockfish, flatfish and saltfish are also important export items, and so are herring oil and herring meal. The chief trading partners of Iceland are the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the Nordic Countries.

The Icelandic fishing fleet was entirely renewed and modernized after World War II and now ranks among the best equipped in the world.

Other Industries

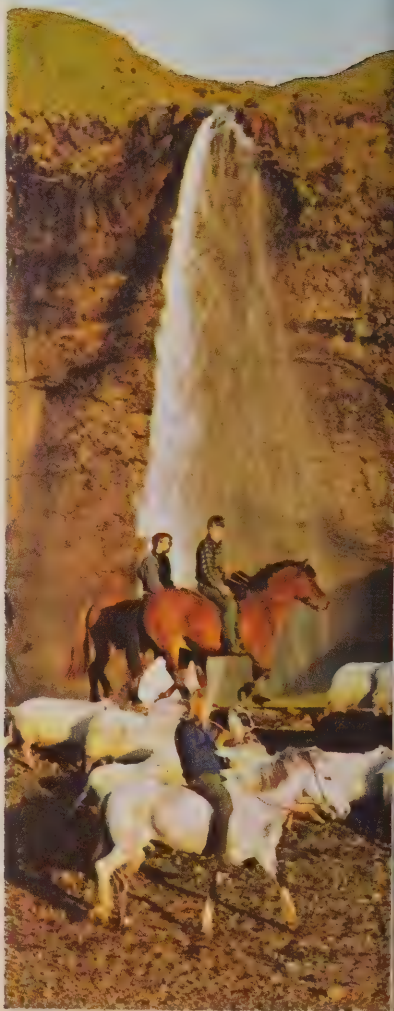
Iceland was until the beginning of this century basically an agricultural country. By necessity agriculture has always been limited in scope. The cultivated areas amount to only 1 per cent of the country. The active growing season is only 4–5 months and farming is based exclusively on cultivation of grass and animal husbandry. The quality of the grass is very good; it is harvested twice every summer and it either stored dry as hay in barns or in silos for winter feed. Generally, nine-tenths of the farmers' income are derived

from livestock and more than half of that from the sale of milk. In recent decades barley and oats have been grown on experimental farms with fair success. Potatoes and turnips are grown in considerable quantities, and greenhouse cultivation is extensive in thermal areas, tomatoes and flowers being the main crops.

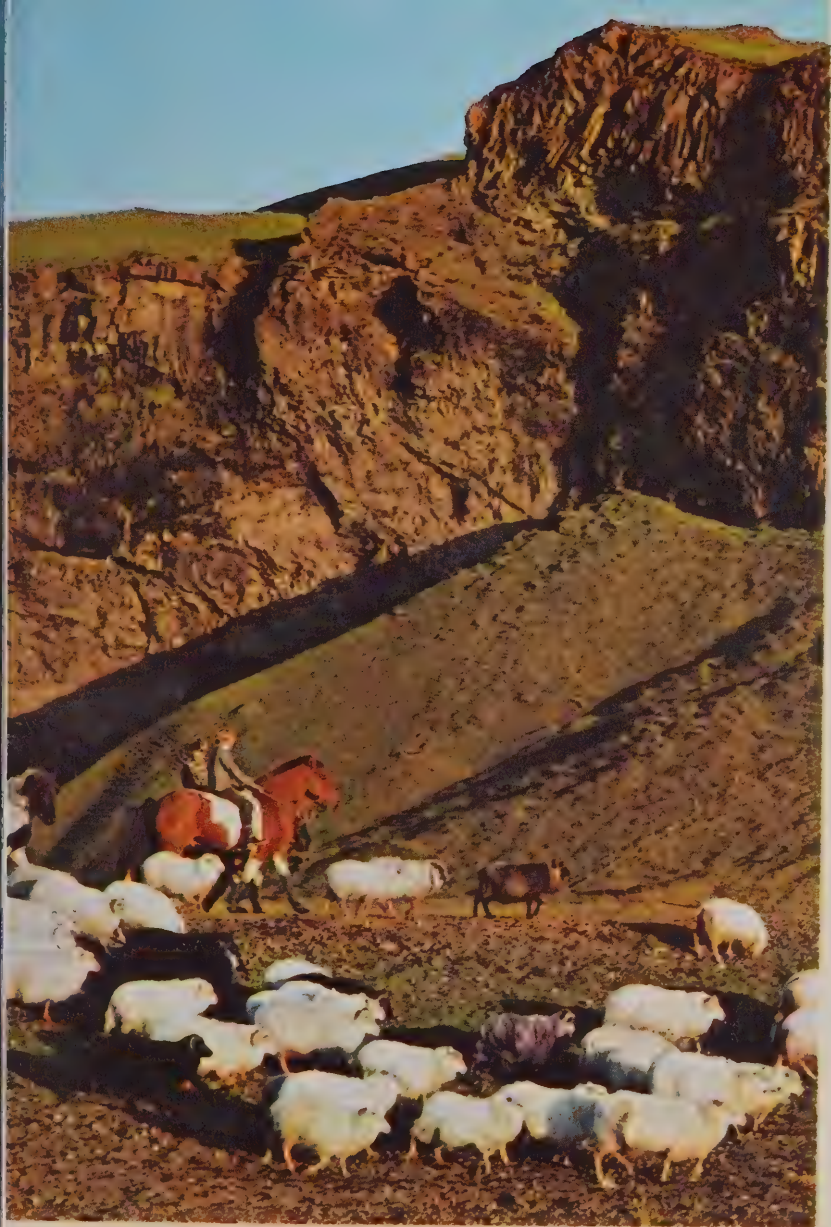
There are some 5,000 farms in Iceland, each standing apart and isolated, a peculiar Icelandic rural feature. The average size of a farm is about 1,250 acres. About 80 per cent of the farms are privately owned. Since World War II agriculture in Iceland has been thoroughly mechanized.

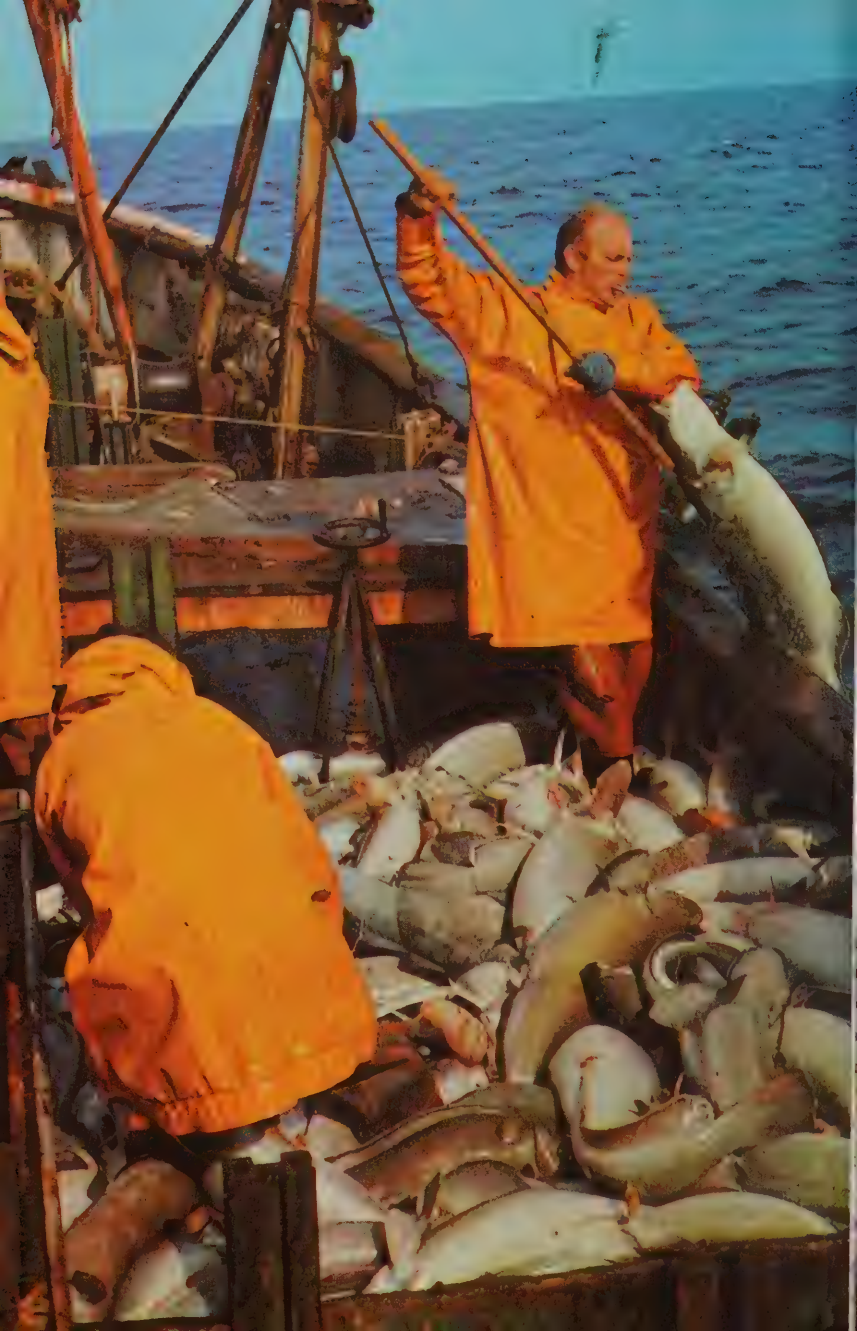
Cattle and sheep have always been the two main foundations of Icelandic farming. Cattle breeding focuses on the internal market, while sheep have provided exportable commodities as well as being the chief source of meat, clothing materials and fats for the domestic market. Horses are still found in great numbers in Iceland, but they are no longer "man's most useful servant" as in former days, having been replaced by machines. However, they are still very popular for pleasure riding and are exported to Europe and America in goodly numbers.

Mechanized industry is a rela-



For centuries Iceland was primarily a farming society.





vely recent development in Iceland, but its pace is rapidly increasing, in spite of a dire scarcity of raw materials and capital. About 5 per cent of the population are occupied in industry, of whom about one-third are women. The fishing industry is by far the most important, with processing plants all around the country and a number of factories for producing fish meal and for canning. With the great increase in hydro-electric power production in recent years a few relatively large factories have come into operation. There is a nitrogen fertilizer plant at Gufunes, 8 miles west of Reykjavík, with a production capacity of 24,000 tons a year, and a cement plant at Akranes, across the bay from Reykjavík, producing 110,000 tons of cement per year. At Lake Mývatn in the northeast there is a diatomite plant, operated since 1966 in co-operation with an American concern, producing 30,000 tons of diatomite annually, and since 1969 there has been a large aluminium reduction plant at Straumsvík, 8 miles south of Reykjavík, producing 40,000 tons of aluminium annually in 1969–71, and reaching 70,000 tons by 1972. It is run by an Icelandic subsidiary of the Swiss Aluminium Co. Other industries include the manufacture of ceramics, clothing,

shoes, carpets, furniture, electrical appliances, soap, paints, candles, chocolate, margarine, butter, bread, biscuits, children's toys and various kinds of plastic utensils. There are also ship-building yards, various kinds of workshops and service stations. The building industry is a large occupation, and so is book publishing. Most of the industry is located in Reykjavík and Akureyri (where co-operative industry prevails), but some of the other towns have their share in it.

Commerce and services occupy another 35 per cent of the population.

Travel and Communications

Until the turn of the century there were no roads to speak of in Iceland and the horse was practically the only means of communication besides boats. Organized road building did not begin until about 1900, and the first roads were only intended for horse-drawn traffic. There have never been any railways or trams in Iceland, but in 1913 the automobile was introduced, and after that road making progressed rapidly. By 1930 all the most important districts had been linked by roads, but winter road communication remains very diffi-



Tourist Notes

Loftleidir Icelandic Airlines, Vesturgata 2, tel. 20200

Icelandair (Flugfélag Íslands), Laekjargata 2, tel. 16600

BEA, Bankastræti 11, tel. 23112

Pan American World Airlines,

Hafnarstræti 19, tel. 10275

Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS),

Laugavegur 3, tel. 21199

Iceland Steamship Company,

Pósthússtræti 2, tel. 21460

State Shipping Department,

Tryggvagata (Hafnarhús), tel. 17650

Iceland State Tourist Bureau,

Laekjargata 3, tel. 11540

Sunna Travel Agency (Vikingtravel),

Bankastræti 7, tel. 16400

Útsýn Tourist Bureau, Austurstræti 17, tel. 23510

Zoega Travel Bureau, Hafnarstræti 5, tel. 11964

Úrval Travel Bureau, Pósthússtræti 2, tel. 26900

American Express Co. Inc., Keflavík Airport, tel. Reykjavík 24324

Landsýn Travel Bureau,

Laugavegur 54, tel. 22890

Úlfar Jacobsen Travel Bureau,

Austurstræti 9, tel. 13499

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Laugavegur 18A, tel. 18950

Hotels in Reykjavík

Hotel Loftleidir, Reykjavík Airport

Hotel Saga, Hagatorg

Hotel Borg, Pósthússtræti 11

Hotel Holt, Bergstadastræti 37

Hotel Esja, Sudurlandsbraut 2

Hotel City, Ránargata 4a

Hotel Vik, Vallarstræti 4

Salvation Army, Kirkjustraeti 2

Hotel Nes, Skippholt 21

Hotel Gardur (summer only)

Edda Hotel (summer only)

Hotels in Akureyri

Hotel KEA

Hotel Vardborg

Hotel Akureyri

Hlidarfjall Ski Hotel

Edda Hotel (summer only)



travellers come to Iceland because of many interests.
Neil Armstrong (opposite page) came to look at
the "lunar landscapes" before his great mission to the Moon.

cult in many places. Motor vehicles increased enormously, especially after World War II, as is indicated by the fact that in 1939 there were a little over 2,000 vehicles in the country, but in 1970 they were 47,300, of which 5,658 were trucks and lorries and 567 passenger coaches. Most farmers have their own jeeps, and private companies run regular coach services throughout the country. Bus services in Reykjavík and Akureyri are run by the municipality. Almost all the large rivers in Iceland, except for a few glacier rivers in the southeast, have now been bridged, and so have many of the smaller ones, too. The road system is about 7,000 miles long, most of it consisting of gravel surfaces.

There are many good natural harbours in Iceland, and at present there are regular coastal services between all the main ports. Until World War I most of the Icelandic cargo traffic, both coastal and trans-oceanic, was handled by foreigners, mainly Danes and Norwegians, but in 1914 capital was raised among the citizens of Iceland to form the Iceland Steamship Company, which was responsible for most of the coastal services – in addition to trans-ocean transport – until 1929, when the State Shipping Department was established and took over coastal

duties. The Iceland Steamship Company has about a dozen ships, including one accommodating 200 passengers, which maintains regular line services between Reykjavík, Leith and Copenhagen, while the cargo vessels sail to various ports in Europe and North America. Altogether there are nine shipping companies operating services between Iceland and other countries.

Air transport began in 1919, but was not fully organized until 1938 when Icelandair was formed and started its internal air services, which it has continued to this day. Loftleidir Icelandic Airlines was established in 1944 and ran domestic services alongside Icelandair until 1952. Both these companies have expanded enormously after the war. In addition to internal services, carrying the equivalent of more than half the population annually (108,328 in 1970), Icelandair operates services between Iceland and Norway, Denmark, Faroes and Britain, while Loftleidir concentrates on services between New York and various countries in Western Europe via Iceland. Loftleidir offers the lowest air fares on scheduled flight across the Atlantic and carries about 3 per cent of all passenger traffic between North America and Europe.

An indication of the expansion of the two companies is that in 1950



*Ski-ing is a popular sport,
and swimming is a part of everyday life in Iceland.*

they carried 5,700 passengers on scheduled international flights, a total of almost 11,776,000 passenger-kilometres, but in 1970 they carried over 360,000 passengers, a total of 1,720,000,000 passenger-kilometres. International services are operated from Keflavík Airport, while domestic services are maintained from Reykjavík Airport. Besides the two Icelandic companies, Iceland is served by Pan American, SAS and BEA.

In 1906 a submarine telegraph cable was laid from Scotland to Iceland, and in the same year telephone lines were established in Iceland itself. Radio-telephone submarine cable linking Scotland and Iceland (Scottice) came into use in 1962, and in 1963 a similar link with Canada (Icecan) was opened. Telex-services are employed by many Icelandic companies. The telephone is extensively used in Iceland. There is about one instrument for every four inhabitants, and 95 per cent of all the scattered farms are on the telephone.

Sports and Receptions

Travelling and camping in the country is one of the favourite pastimes of the Icelanders. There are abundant opportunities for mountain climbing, hiking, angling for

salmon and trout in streams and lakes, and swimming in gorges or swimming pools with natural hot water. Ski-ing is fairly common, especially in the north and north-west, but in the south snow is more unpredictable. Skating is very popular, but again the fluctuating climate interferes, especially in the south. Athletics have long been among the most popular sports in Iceland, and there have been several athletes of international distinction. Also very popular are football (soccer), handball, and lately basketball. A special Icelandic sport, not to be found elsewhere, is the so-called *glima* or wrestling, dating back to the first settlers and still practised. Powered flying and gliding are also comparatively common sports, not forgetting golf and horse-riding, both of which are quite popular. Chess and bridge have long been popular games in Iceland, and in both fields Icelandic players have won a great reputation in international championships. Boxing is prohibited in Iceland.

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